

## **‘Now you see ’em, now you don’t’: Jewish visibility and the problem of citizenship in the British Telecom ‘Beattie’ campaign**

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In 1989 I had the strange experience of moving from Montreal, a place with a large, highly visible and prominent Jewish community to England where, if there were any Jews, they were, for me at the time, virtually impossible to recognize. Even more strangely, however, I had the parallel experience of moving from a place where Jews were not notable for their presence in television advertising in what one might politely term ‘broadly comic form’, to one where every night in prime time courtesy of British Telecom, Maureen Lipman’s larger than life Beattie and her larger than life family made their way into my home. And so I faced the paradox of why it was that although (non-orthodox) real Jews in Britain seemed acculturated to the degree that to a foreigner like myself they were effectively invisible, at the same time, a group of fictional characters who were so relentlessly Jewish could attain this sort of hypervisibility. It wasn’t simply that Beattie and her family had captured some marginal facet of the popular imagination, but rather, as one writer for *Campaign* magazine put it (1989c: 46), that they had actually ‘deposed’ the Oxo family as *the* mass media icon of British middle-class family life.

This is the paradox I will be addressing here in a number of ways: by connecting this episode in the history of Anglo-Jewry to a number of more long-standing social dynamics, by considering recent arguments about advertising, consumption and citizenship, and through an analysis of some of the ads themselves. Throughout, however, my underlying concern will be with asking whether the unprecedented success and popularity of the Beattie campaign is a true measure of the success of Jewish integration into

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British mainstream cultural life or merely a contemporary example of the way in which long-standing historical patterns of Jewish assimilation in Britain seem consistently to reproduce a form of counterfeit citizenship, however prominently displayed.

## I

The success of the Beattie campaign speaks for itself, the ads having commanded what advertisers referred to as 'tremendous levels of recall' (*Campaign*, 1992: 19). It was not just that people remembered the ads or could easily identify a slogan associated with them, but that they became part of a shared, if transient, culture of popular reference. As Richard Phillips, originator of the campaign for the J. Walter Thompson agency put it, 'almost immediately the campaign started running, it was getting press attention.' The ad in which Beattie's grandson tells her that of all his exams he's passed only pottery and sociology (which Beattie translates into getting an 'ology') was especially instrumental in its success, giving rise to an expression that 'border[ed] on becoming a national catchphrase' (Lipman and Phillips, 1990: n.p.) – an extraordinary outcome given the campaign's apparently humble origins.

Phillips's account of the campaign is rather disarming. Ironically dismissing the 'Svengali'-like power of advertising, he describes himself taking up the Telecom account only because a fellow copywriter went on holiday. Having been given a brief 'to encourage people to understand the value of a phone call in an inter-family relationship . . . e.g. Phone your mother', everything fell into place. As a 'nice Jewish boy of nearly 40 years', he claims he was 'one of the world's greatest living authorities on the subject of phoning your mother'. Hence the 'miniscule leap' to using a Jewish mother 'who treats a telephone line as the next best thing to an umbilical cord . . .'. Despite anxieties about the possibility of causing offence (happily assuaged by the reassurances of his brother and other Jewish people he knew), extremely negative indications from the pre-production market research, and other unspecified trials and tribulations, the campaign went into production, attaining its critical mass with the casting of Maureen Lipman, an actress carrying plenty of intertextual Jewish weight (Lipman and Phillips, 1990: n.p.). All in all, a story of success from humble origins strangely familiar in relation to the Jews.

In industry terms the campaign was equally remarkable. In 1988–9 alone, British Telecom ads featuring Maureen Lipman in the role of Beattie, the Jewish mother, won nearly 50 major awards including British Television Advertising Awards, Cannes Advertising Film Festival Awards,

*Campaign* magazine's award for campaign of the year, New York Art Director's Club awards, Creative Circle awards, *Marketing Week* awards for creative excellence and even the *TV Times* award for readers' favourite ad campaign (Lipman and Phillips, 1990: n.p.).<sup>1</sup>

Within the Jewish community there was some dislike for Beattie, evident sporadically in the letters page of the *Jewish Chronicle*, but overall, the campaign was never seriously contested. There were no organized representations made to the Independent Television Commission (then the Independent Broadcasting Authority) and the Board of Deputies of British Jews reported only 'one or two complaints from members of the public who felt unhappy about the character', although they did note that when the subject came up at 'various public meetings or informal house meetings . . . there were usually a number of people who wanted to voice an opinion' (Hart, 1992: personal correspondence). The ITC reported similarly that the campaign had 'been the subject of very little criticism' with regard to 'the portrayal of Jews with complaints numbering . . . in total no more than 5 since transmission began' (Alban, 1993: personal correspondence). Moreover, while some members of the Jewish community expressed dislike for the ways in which the campaign represented Jews, many others were more than happy to celebrate the humour and readily declared their identification with Beattie and her clan.<sup>2</sup> Jewish comedian David Schneider, in a full page article in the *Observer*, even went so far as to argue that Beattie was part of an 'awakening of Jewish culture' in Britain and a harbinger of improving inter-community relations (1994: 4).

Given their extraordinary success and public profile then, these ads need to be understood as a cultural phenomenon in their own right. *Campaign* magazine for 1 September 1989 underscored such a view when it counted the Beattie series among the handful of 'cult classics' that move beyond their '30 seconds of fame' (*Campaign*, 1989a). Like the celebrated ads for Levis, Nescafé Gold Blend, Holsten Pils and Carling Black Label, the writer argued, the Beattie ads were 'reminiscent of Hollywood's golden days when the dream machine was spending millions creating fantasy for the masses' (*Campaign*, 1989a: 48). What is striking in terms of the arguments I will be presenting here, however, is the particular nature of the fantasy in question. For the evident sex appeal of Levis, alcohol, or even instant coffee when 'would you like to come up for coffee?' obviously means 'would you like to come up for something else?' hardly seems commensurate with the allure of long-distance rates, phone cards or the change (as it then was) to 071/081 dialling codes for London. If there is an element of fantasy operating here then it is of a very different but evidently equally powerful kind, raising the question of exactly what sort of fantasy it might be. In order to explore this issue further it will be helpful to take a longer historical view.

## II

That it is in an advertising campaign that a Jewish family should attain such notoriety is not altogether surprising, given the extent to which Britain's relationship to its Jews has long been economically determined. One could draw on examples reaching back hundreds of years, but in this instance it is the social and political dynamics of the 19th century that are the most germane. Here we might highlight Lord Macaulay's famous arguments of the 1830s in favour of Jewish emancipation for the way in which, typically, economics and not abstract notions of rights or citizenship make the case. Macaulay maintained that since Jews already exercised such a considerable financial influence on British society, it was perilous to exclude them from the polity because this meant that, although economically influential, they would never be politically answerable for their actions. Likewise, several decades later, when public attention had shifted from the emancipation debates to the question of immigration, a similar sort of attitude prevailed in relation to liberal advocacy on behalf of immigrant Jews. In the face of scaremongering arguments about degeneration from the right, accusations of an incapacity for trade combination from the left, and a generally inhospitable welcome from an established Anglo-Jewish community worried about its own reputation and security, it was the voice of *laissez-faire* virtually alone that welcomed the immigrant Jews.

In a culture where one's self-helping potential and apparent resemblance to liberalism's ideal economic man were measures of prospective citizenship, the logic was painfully obvious. If Jews were 'willing' to work and live under worse conditions for less money than anyone else, then surely they should be allowed to do so. After all, never had the fortunes of any one group of people lent themselves so obviously to underwriting the Smilesian ideology while at the same time upholding the public face of liberal humanitarianism. Indeed, as John Garrard (1971: 86) has suggested, the immigrant Jews of the late 19th century may well have been *the* example of the virtues of self-help and *laissez-faire* that Victorian liberalism had so long believed in but had so rarely seen manifest.

These arguments are relatively familiar. What remains to be seen is how the paradox of visibility and invisibility with which I began is implicated in these economically driven social dynamics. Here Bill Williams's work on the 'anti-semitism of tolerance' in late Victorian Manchester provides a useful starting point.

Williams's account of what he calls the 'anti-semitism of tolerance' begins with the gentleman's agreement or liberal social contract which prevailed, by 1870, between Manchester's middle-class elite and the relatively small and entrepreneurial Jewish community. Under the terms of this agreement, Jews would not simply be tolerated but indeed encouraged to prosper provided they conformed to the dominant values of their host

society. So long as they displayed sufficient levels of 'patriotism, civic virtue, respectability, benevolence, business integrity and commercial enterprise' (1985: 75), Jews could themselves be held up as model citizens, outsiders who could out-English the English. Another way of putting this is simply to say that Jews were welcome provided they effaced the outward signs of cultural difference, in effect, so long as they made themselves invisible *as Jews*.

This dynamic of acceptance tied to invisibility is similarly evident with regard to the influx of immigrants from eastern Europe as the obligation to be self-effacing was extended from the established Jewish community to its newly arriving charges. Thus, one overriding concern of established Jews engaged in philanthropic work with the immigrant community was, quite simply, to conceal it from public view until it could be transformed into something more akin to the acceptably undifferentiated face of the middle classes. Even 'the rapid growth of a Jewish working-class during the 1860s and 1870s did little to disturb the predominant liberal image of the Jewish community as a middle-class society of merchants, shopkeepers and professional men' (Williams, 1985: 81–2). Partly this was because the classic slum area of Red Bank was already effectively invisible for being 'self-contained', 'barricaded', and 'shielded from view', and partly because Jewish philanthropy and the dominant climate of expectation overlaid working-class visibility with familiar fantasies of the respectable poor as clean, thrifty, industrious and self-reliant (Williams, 1985: 81–2). As Williams's work demonstrates then, there is a connection between positive images of Jewish citizenship and social belonging and a wider culture of invisibility which seems to make those images possible. But there is another element to the story which needs to be considered here and that is the relationship between this consensual culture of Jewish invisibility and more radically anti-semitic forms of representation.

Although subordinate to the culture of liberal toleration in Manchester there existed, throughout the mid to late 19th century, a more radical culture of anti-semitism evident in some sections of the burgeoning periodical press. In the 1870s and 1880s publications such as the *City Lantern*, the *City Jackdaw* and the *Parrot* revived a series of classically anti-semitic tropes which stood in contrast to the celebrations of Jewish civic virtue characterizing the liberal standard (Williams, 1985: 78–90). Here Jews assumed their familiar guise as avaricious, commercially unscrupulous, socially exclusive, and ostentatious in their displays of wealth. When the question of immigration came to the forefront of public attention, images of sweated labour and of sub-human immigrant swarms came similarly to appear in the pages of the *Manchester City News* and the satirical weekly *Spy*. As Williams points out, ultimately, these more radically anti-Jewish forms of representation served merely to unsettle rather than overwhelm the liberal social contract and the forms of

representation associated with it (1985: 81), but nonetheless there are a couple of observations worth making here.

The first is that although publications sporting obviously anti-Jewish material could lay claim only to a small part of the market, and that for a limited time, they nevertheless represented a serious attempt on the part of some journalists and publishers to capture a significant part of that market share. That the attempt ultimately failed in the face of the more powerful culture of bourgeois accommodation does not alter this fact. So, while liberalism and its imagery of toleration may thus keep more radical forms of anti-semitism at bay, it has no active need to seek their eradication. The difficult issue then, is not understanding images of liberal toleration, but understanding the relationship between those images and the more radically anti-semitic images they submerge but which then have a tendency to resurface at times of heightened social anxiety about Jews. From this longer-term historical perspective then, there are three propositions I would offer about the Beattie campaign.

First, any convincing reading of the campaign needs to take into account the longer-term vicissitudes of visibility and invisibility in Anglo-Jewish history, a history which has been a markedly 'now you see 'em, now you don't' sort of affair. While one might choose to read the hypervisibility of Beattie and her family in the 1980s as the triumphant return of the middle-class Jew to the stage of British public life, this reading is only possible because we know that there are no nasty surprises waiting in the wings. To put it another way, one reason why it was possible, or rather quite safe, for British Telecom to deploy Jewish characters as prominently as they did was that by the 1980s Jews had long ceased to manifest themselves as an alien threat to British daily life. Substitute representatives of a more highly charged ethnicity and the campaign quickly becomes inconceivable. Imagine, if you will, a South Asian or Afro-Caribbean family as heirs apparent to the Oxo throne.

My second proposition about the Beattie campaign concerns its relationship to Thatcherism. For, very much in keeping with the Thatcherite redeployment of other Victorian social dynamics, the Beattie campaign recapitulates both the ostentatious public embrace of the Jews and the economic opportunism underlying it. It is not just the prominence of Jews in Thatcher's cabinet that springs to mind but, as Hugo Young has noted, the belief in Jews as the self-helpers par excellence, a belief strongly held by the MP for Finchley. 'A close similarity existed between the values she admired and the putatively "Jewish belief in self-help" and "ambition and self-advancement"' (1989: 422–3). Just as liberal advocacy on behalf of immigrant Jews in the 1880s allowed Britain to maximize its economic potential while maintaining a humanitarian public image so, in the 1980s and 1990s, Margaret Thatcher could show a human face by being nice to Jews while pursuing her own economic and social policies. Moreover, it

was on the strength of the Beattie campaign that J. Walter Thompson led a successful bid to market 'the second stage of the Government's BT sell off'. And in one of those historical accidents resonant with poetic justice, it was on the morning of Mrs Thatcher's resignation that the J. Walter Thompson agency made 10 percent of its staff redundant (*Campaign*, 1992: 19).

My third proposition about the Beattie campaign relates to the enduringly difficult question of the relationship between apparently tolerant images of Jews and more obviously anti-semitic forms of representation. In this instance, the point is prompted by the strange case of a Midland Bank ad which attempted to catch the wave of Beattie's popularity in 1988 but which was pulled off the air for its blatant anti-semitism.<sup>3</sup> The ad was for Midland's Credo service package for small businesses and featured a grossly stereotypical sweatshop factory owner showing his Midland representative around the shop floor. He is depicted as vulgar and exploitive as he licks his finger in order to pick a single dropped sequin up off the floor and tries to prevent his employees hearing about what the Midland has to offer in the way of employee benefits packages.

While the Telecom ads lack the abrasive edge of the Midland disaster, the concurrence of the two does seem to echo the dynamic characterizing the relationship between images of liberal toleration and the more radically anti-semitic images Williams describes circulating in part of Manchester's 19th-century periodical press. Just as someone then thought there would be a market for that sort of material, someone in 1988 thought the Midland ad would work.

In fact, that someone was Tony Wake, copywriter for Allen, Brady & Marsh who produced the ad and who, in November 1988, appeared on Channel 4's *Right to Reply* to answer for it along with Frank Willis, then controller of advertising for the IBA. The challenge to the ad's suitability was led by Jeremy Lawrence of the Association of Jewish 6th Formers, who rather persuasively pointed out the unfortunate familiarity of the gestures and characteristics the ad deployed. What is interesting about the discussion which took place is, first, its clear identification of the British Telecom campaign as a perceived precedent for the Midland ad, and second, its highlighting of the ongoing quandary of Jewish visibility and invisibility. For while the factory owner's Jewishness was obviously visible to Jeremy Lawrence and to the IBA who alerted the agency, at the vetting stage of the ad's potential to cause offence, it was apparently invisible to the copywriter who maintains that the character was not intended to be Jewish at all. What is most extraordinary about this latter claim, given the extreme vulgarity of the imagery, is its evident sincerity; there is nothing in the *Right to Reply* segment to suggest that Tony Wake's protestations of innocence were, in any way, disingenuous. Rather, what appears to be the case is that it was entirely possible for a copywriter for an advertising

agency successful enough to be dealing with a concern as large as the Midland Bank – in effect someone with a significant degree of social awareness and professional responsibility – to identify a set of characteristics, to attribute those characteristics to a ‘certain type of person’, and to be genuinely unaware of their pernicious associations with Jews.

But even if we put such issues aside, we are left with the question of whether the Beattie ads were really different in kind from the Midland one or just in degree. Arguably, the gendering of the campaign as predominantly female through Beattie’s insuperable matriarchalism, through the domestic orientation of the ads, and through their thematic use of activities such as cooking, eating, shopping and nagging, encourages us to read as affectionate jest characteristics which, in the public and masculine world of factory owning, we are much more likely to read as overtly anti-semitic.

### III

Some of the scholarship on consumption, advertising and citizenship would suggest that this is too pessimistic a reading of the Beattie phenomenon and, by implication, that the Telecom campaign may genuinely be cause for celebration. Using a broadly cultural definition of enfranchisement in which ‘to be a citizen means to be included culturally, not just civically, socially and politically’, Irene Costera Meijer (1998: 235), for example, makes a case for ‘advertising’s potential as a . . . setting for the actualization of notions of contemporary citizenship’. In this analysis the appearance of upwardly mobile black people in a MacDonalds’ ad

. . . makes visible and imaginable a new story of responsible black male citizenship that can be a source of inspiration and guidance for men and women, whites and blacks. The ad draws people into a valuable . . . awareness of (good) citizenship and it calls for a new and just lifestyle. (1998: 242)

While the optimism of this reading is perhaps, in some sense, laudable its political naivete is disturbing. One need hardly espouse a hard-line Marxist view in order to notice and factor in the differences between a profit-generating venture for one of the world’s most powerful transnational corporations and public service broadcasting on behalf of improved inter-community relations.<sup>4</sup>

The critique is not intended to dismiss but rather to underline the need for a more substantive analysis of the politics of citizenship manifested in the use of ethnic minorities in national advertising, especially in relation to something like the culture of Thatcherism. For as critical ventures such as *New Times* have pointed out, the changing face of politics in the 1980s and early 1990s gave rise to changing notions of citizenship including the re-invention and apparent re-empowerment of the citizen as consumer.



In their *New Times* article on 'Citizens and Citizenship', David Held and Stuart Hall maintain that it was during the Thatcher years that citizenship made its most significant reappearance in British politics for two decades (1989: 173). The dismantling of the welfare state, the centralization of power, the erosion of local democracy, trade-union, and other civil rights, as well as the increasing tendency towards globalization, all contributed to the decline of the version of the nation-state to which the language of modern citizenship had previously referred (1989: 173). Hence, the need for a new understanding of the term. Moreover, under the Tories, it was a fundamentally Victorian version of citizenship that prevailed, one that bound an individual's status within society to his or her relation to the domains of charity, philanthropy and, crucially, of self-help (1989: 174). The problem with this suspiciously nostalgic version of citizenship, of course, is that it simply reinforces the structural inequalities that have long characterized the concept within classical liberalism. If, as Hall and Held argue, citizenship within a liberal democracy is driven by the principles of membership, rights and duties in reciprocity, and real participation in practice (1989: 175), then it is around the question of membership (or exclusion) and the tension between formal and substantive rights (i.e. rights guaranteed in principle versus rights that one has the means to exercise in practice) that the politics of citizenship begins. And it is at this point that arguments about the centrality of consumption and advertising arise for it is in these arenas perhaps more than anywhere else that contemporary civil society grapples with the question of membership and rights. In short, it would appear that it is in the world of consumption, reflected and construed in the imagery of advertising, that new definitions of citizenship are being forged.

In Britain and elsewhere in the late 20th century there are compelling reasons for taking seriously the proposition that one's status as a citizen has, for better or worse, become inextricably linked to one's status as a consumer. For many people in Britain significant social action is more likely to be conceived as the exercise of consumer preferences, and rights to be understood as the statutory rights of the consumer than, say, voting in local council elections is to be perceived as politically significant in the long term. Elsewhere, in Eastern Europe for example, 'people are being encouraged to treat the language of commodities as the vernacular of civil society and the Esperanto of European unity' (Agnew, 1993: 34). But recognizing these facts needn't lead us into a romantic recovery of shopping as a form of direct action, or of advertising as the voice of the people. Arguing that 'commodities and their images . . . can be pushed and pulled into the service of resistant demands and dreams', or that 'high-tech in the hands of young blacks or girls making-up . . . can be very effectively hijacked for cultures of resistance' (Mort, 1989: 166), does little to alter or even acknowledge the disproportionate number of young blacks in the

criminal courts or the persistent wage differential between men and women. Simply put, it is surely a mistake to imagine that the exercise of consumer choice somehow solves the problem of uneven citizenship.

In his cogent analysis of contemporary scholarship on consumer culture, the historian Jean-Christophe Agnew sheds some much needed light on the re-configuration of the citizen as consumer. The tendency within recent scholarship toward the political redemption of consumer choices (1993: 28) and the politicization of the pleasure principle (1993: 29), in effect toward the 'reformulation of . . . consumer expectations as political or proto-political entitlements' (1993: 31) is a tendency Agnew associates with a generation of scholars themselves raised on mass culture and the counter-culture of the 1960s (1993: 29). One characteristic of such work which Agnew usefully identifies is its common starting point in the assumption that 'mass consumer culture – whatever its origins – can no longer be discussed as if its presence were still an open question, a matter of choice' (1993: 29). As the boundaries of consumer culture are, for the purpose of analysis, pushed backward in time and outward in space so as to encompass all contemporary experience, any sense of 'moral and political option' disappears. Consumption thus ceases to be perceived as an act of participation in an economic system and becomes instead 'the very element we breathe' (1993: 29), something we cannot avoid or do anything about.<sup>5</sup>

Given this starting point, certain interpretive strategies are then favoured. The first, Agnew notes, is a preference for 'metaphors of mapping' as if the ubiquity of consumer culture leaves the analyst no choice but to undertake a 'detailed charting of this ever-expanding universe of goods – complete, of course, with its fissures and fault lines of class, race, gender and ethnicity' (1993: 29–30). This produces an effect he describes as a 'crazy quilt of desire which, depending on one's agenda, may be mobilized to produce a hegemonic bloc or a marketing coup; a Rainbow Coalition or a pot of gold' (1993: 30). On one level, then, the putative inevitability of consumer culture is constantly reinscribed by the very process of mapping. While on another, the production of such descriptions further reinforces this effect by substituting the apparent struggles between different consumer factions for any possibility of struggle between consumer culture and anything outside it.

The second tendency arising from this all encompassing view of consumer culture is one which sets concepts such as subsistence, use-value and labour aside in order to emphasize instead the symbolic dimension of consumption (1993: 30). Here production 'survives largely as a figure of speech, a metaphor used to evoke the active powers at play in the symbolic uses to which a produced and purchased good may be put' (1993: 30). Thus we are offered accounts of the ways in which consumers 'invariably reread, reconfigure and recontextualize their purchases, and in doing so, reproduce, recreate and refashion themselves.' The actual labour involved

in producing commodities disappears as consumption itself becomes 'cultural work', productive of 'cultural capital', and grist for cultural 'resistance' (1993: 30).

What this leaves us is a number of questions about the extent to which private desires can indeed meaningfully reconstruct notions of public rights and obligations. For as Agnew reminds us, 'it is one thing to pursue the politics of consumption, to struggle over and through the meaning of goods; it is quite another to . . . form one's political thought and practice upon the model of commodity-exchange' (1993: 32). There is a considerable distance to be traversed between a 'subversive reverie of plenitude' and organized political practice (1993: 33). Besides, as Agnew concludes, it is 'precisely because the meanings of commodities are so fluid and recontextualizable that questions of responsibility and accountability remain submerged within them' (1993: 33). These are problems that remain to be understood.

With these caveats in mind, we can now return to the Beattie campaign and the ongoing problem of Jewish citizenship in Britain. What I will argue is that far from expressing a hard-won enfranchisement through participation in the democratizing field of consumption, these 34 ads powerfully signify Beattie's perennial exclusion from the world she thinks she so fully inhabits.

#### IV

On the face of it, Beattie and her family are the modern British citizens par excellence, displaying, as they do, the winning combination of family values and enthusiastic participation in enterprise culture. But if we scratch the surface certain complications become apparent.

The first pertains to the question of ethnicity and, more specifically, to whether Beattie and her family have become the Oxos *de nos jours* in spite of their ethnicity or because of it. On the one hand we might argue that Beattie's Jewishness is being represented as normative to the point where it has become irrelevant, but given the breadth and nature of the caricature this hardly seems plausible. Rather, there seems to be a complex irony at work here in relation to the use of Jews as icons of the British middle class. For, if one were to imagine a nuclear family with a stay-at-home mother who cooks, cleans and lives vicariously through her husband and children, one where the young businessman son can evoke exclamations of pride and amazement from his mother with a fax machine or a car phone, one is likely to be imagining a form of traditionalism that by the 1980s was largely associated with certain ethnic communities though not necessarily with Jews. The irony, in other words, is that the fantasy of self-help and family values at the centre of British Telecom's Thatcherite re-invention of

citizenship is one that finds greatest purchase among those least likely to pass the cricket test.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the ads' deployment of a Jewish family reveals an obvious historical displacement. They revive a 19th-century endorsement of values and social perceptions which, by the time of the campaign, were, in fact, most strongly associated not with Jews but with the Asian community in Britain – a community which, at that point however, was (and is) still too visible in its difference to supply an iconically middle-class family of citizens.

A second set of complications arise in relation to Beattie's own status as a citizen/consumer. For while the former aspect of her social identity would seem to be guaranteed by the latter, in fact, there are powerful counter-narratives at work which undercut her claim to belonging at every turn. If we look in more detail at some of the ads we can see what these counter-narratives are and how they operate.

Throughout the Beattie series a number of themes recur mainly around food and family; half of the ads feature food or eating either as foreground or prominent background activity and nearly three-quarters of them, family relations in some form. On one level this is predictable and, for this reason, apparently innocuous. But on another, these representations recall social perceptions from an earlier historical moment that are not entirely benign. Late 19th-century popular discourse about Jews was often concerned with the 'darker side' of the very characteristics that liberal advocacy so enthusiastically championed. Family and community loyalty became treacherous clannishness, the emaciated form of the sweatshop operative became the pot-bellied profile of the capitalist, and the self-helping aspirations of an immigrant community, the grasping vulgarity of the perennial outsider.

Despite the fact that they are rendered 'harmless' for being feminized (see my earlier remarks), Beattie's apparent insatiability and her complete disregard for any sort of personal, social or professional boundaries, recall such 'thin edge of the wedge' anxieties about Jews. When her son, Melvin, phones to say he'll be working late, Beattie insists that she'll come to his office to bring him something to eat, pausing just long enough in front of the open door of her groaning refrigerator to lament the fact that she's not got much in. Even being away on business in Edinburgh doesn't secure Melvin's professional dignity, since Beattie's discovery of the call diversion service which she uses to redirect her calls to the local supermarket: 'If Melvin calls I'll be in fruit and veg'. When Beattie loses her glasses and retraces her steps in an attempt to find them, they lead her from deli to patisserie to phonebox because 'I always call Elaine [her daughter] while I'm eating'. And the key to her grandson Anthony passing his driving test, Beattie insists, lies not in Anthony's mastery of the necessary skills but in bringing the examiner round for 'tea and a coconut macaroon'. When this same grandson fails all his exams except for pottery and sociology in the

famous 'You got an 'ology!' ad, Beattie blames the teachers for their inability to appreciate her grandson's talents: 'it's the teachers who are wrong, you know they can't mark; a lot of them can't see'. The self-validating logic of the successful outsider literally knows no bounds.

Even more evident are the signs of Beattie's alien nature in ads which are explicitly about her consumer behaviour or, more specifically, which are about her vulgar exercise of consumer prerogatives as a means of altering her social status. In an ad alerting customers to the impending introduction of 071/081 dialling codes for London, Beattie contests her identity as a suburbanite by referring disparagingly to her metropolitan friend's 'inner city' number. In two other ads, both of which are about the use of freecall 0800 numbers, Beattie displays her 'why not get something for nothing' mentality by making pointless inquiries. In the one ad her first impulse, when she hears about the 0800 service, is to try to get free calls by prefixing ordinary telephone numbers with the 0800 code. When she learns that this won't work she contents herself with making inquiries about a 'thermo-insulated turbo pump' just because the call is free.

The second 0800 ad is even more powerfully iconic. Having been asked to water the plants by friends away on holiday, Beattie and her husband enter the house and find themselves in an astonishingly huge and dazzlingly white, brand new fitted kitchen. Within seconds, Beattie has located the brochure and has made use of the 0800 number in order to find out how much all of this has cost. When the kitchen designer – apparently applying the 'if you have to ask about the price you can't afford it' rule – snobbishly refers to the fittings at number 52 as 'the deluxe model' and reassures Beattie that they have something to suit every pocket, she peevishly hits back by asking 'what makes you think my pocket isn't deluxe?' and then refers to the installation as a 'kitchenette'. The ad seems iconic not simply because it is about Beattie's social climbing in the usual way but because it seems a veritable allegory of the Jewish presence in Britain. Beattie walks through the door of someone else's house (when they are not there) and finds herself, dreamlike, in the biggest, whitest, most symbolically aspirational kitchen that ever was, as yet unseen and untouched by the house's legitimate inhabitants. While the owners are confident enough to have simply gone on holiday leaving the installers unsupervised and their desirable property unattended, Beattie, by contrast, is caught up immediately in the anxiety of cost and attainability.

This motif of the invisible and effortless rival in consumption is similarly evident in another of the best known ads, 'Not Keeping up With the Joneses'. In this case Beattie makes her presence felt in a household appliance store during the annual sale. She strides about making the sales assistant run after her as she handles the merchandise and slams the door of the dishwasher. The point of the ad is that every appliance Beattie inquires about has already been reserved for a certain Mrs Jones who has done her

shopping by phone. When Beattie finally hits upon one which *is* still available for purchase she turns it down because 'If it's not good enough for Mrs Jones it's not good enough for me!' Like the unseen owner of the white kitchen, Mrs Jones manifests her presence in the shop only as a sort of platonic ideal of consumer behaviour. Mrs Jones doesn't need to finger the merchandise or make the sales assistant run after her for although she is silent and invisible she already has all the things Beattie wants long before Beattie even knows that she wants them.

Even when Beattie mimics Mrs Jones's invisible consumer approach by doing her shopping over the phone she cannot shake off her vulgar, social climbing behaviour. In the famous 'Do You Have a Twelve in the Green' ad, which featured Richard Wilson as the irate dress shop owner, the motif recurs. Here Beattie torments a dress shop owner by asking whether he has a particular style of dress in first one and then another and then yet another colour. When she has exhausted the list of colours, she starts inquiring about other sizes infuriating the shop owner even further. When, through clenched teeth, he tries to bring the conversation to a close by saying 'I thought madam was a 12', we see Beattie at home in front of her dressing table mirror pointing to her underarm as she explains: 'Well, normally yes, but you see if the cut is on the smallish side . . . they're not generous these days . . . you know what I mean, they skimp around the armholes'. As in the appliance store ad, the punchline is Beattie's ultimate refusal to make a purchase. Having been told that they have 'all of the colours in all of the sizes', that they've not sold out of anything, she loses interest declaring 'Its not what you'd call all the rage, is it?'

Beattie's spectacular 5-year stint on prime-time British television signals little in the way of political progress for Britain's Jews. In the historical long term, the Beattie campaign seems most significant as a contemporary example of the ways in which Jewish citizenship in Britain is perpetually subject to an ever-evolving series of qualifications. Beattie may have been watched by millions as she gained entry into her neighbour's kitchen, but it could never signify for her the level of social enfranchisement it did for its invisible owner. Putatively empowering narratives about ourselves linked to practices of consumption are simply no match for long-standing historical narratives about alien-ness and exclusion. Visible or invisible, the story of the Jewish outsider attempting to buy their way into British society is nothing new and certainly nothing to phone home about.

## Notes

1. See also *Campaign*, 1989b: 7.
2. See, for example, the letters page of the *Jewish Chronicle* 1 January 1988, 13 January 1989, 13 October 1989, 25 January 1991.

3. I am indebted to Louise Purbrick for bringing this ad to my attention.
4. For other examples of this sort of argument, see Jib Fowles (1996) and Mica Nava (1992).
5. A particularly striking example of this sort of logic is evident in Daniel Miller's polemic, 'Consumption as the Vanguard of History' in Daniel Miller (1995).
6. The cricket test was infamously mooted by the Conservative politician Norman Tebbit, who claimed that the way to truly gauge a person's loyalties was to ask whether they supported England or their nation of ethnic origin (e.g. India, Pakistan, the West Indies, etc.) at international cricket.

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